

UPDATES ON UNICEF'S WORK TOWARDS ADDRESSING
ANTI-RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

BACKGROUND NOTE

UNICEF Executive Board – Annual Session, 1–4 June 2021

1. In its *decision 2020/21, paragraph 7*, UNICEF's Executive Board requested UNICEF's management to report to the Annual Session of the 2021 Executive Board on the work of the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and on UNICEF actions to prevent and respond to all forms of discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, in its policies, procedures and programmes.
2. This background note is provided for the 2021 Annual Session (1–4 June 2021) as an input to the requested updates.

1. Introduction

3. *People who have long felt unable to speak up on the issues of racism and discrimination are making their voices heard. They are calling on us to lead by example and make UNICEF a truly inclusive workplace. Let's match this moment with a united commitment to end racism and discrimination in our workplace – once and for all.* – UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, June 2020.
4. For years, UNICEF's promotion of a diverse and inclusive workplace concentrated on increasing women's representation and making the workplace more gender-equal. In more recent years, this focus expanded to include issues related to nationality (industrial and programme country groupings within the International Professional cadre); disabilities; age; and very recently, sexual orientation and gender identity beyond the male/female binary.
5. Progress has been made in all these areas. **Firstly**, UNICEF achieved gender parity in the Senior Staff cadre and acquired EDGE Certification¹. The EDGE Action Plan helped UNICEF to revamp its family-friendly policies (flexible work, parental leave, breastfeeding), improve the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated workforce, recruitment and separation data, and increase the dedicated resources towards the prevention of sexual harassment. **Secondly**, new resources have also been allocated for the implementation of the UN Disability Strategy to create a more inclusive work environment for colleagues with disabilities. In 2020 UNICEF increased the annual budget of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, acquired expertise dedicated to disability issues in DHR and Programme Division, adopted a Disability Inclusion HR Policy, and set up a global network of employees with disabilities. **Thirdly**, to address discrimination against youth, UNICEF established a Young UNICEF Employee Resource Group in 2019 that today counts over 1,200 members in 146 countries. **Fourthly**, following results in the latest Global Staff Survey and inter-agency discussions, UNICEF set up a UN

¹ In 2018, UNICEF pursued an examination of its gender equality policies and practices through the World Economic Forum's Economic Dividends for Gender Equality certification. In June 2018, UNICEF received EDGE Certification becoming the first UN agency to earn the leading global assessment methodology and business certification standard for gender equality. This ranking put UNICEF at the top 11 per cent of all EDGE certified organizations. UNICEF was re-certified in 2020.

GLOBE chapter where colleagues who belong to the LGBTIQ+ community contribute to policy reforms both within UNICEF and at the inter-agency level to ensure that no discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sexual orientation takes place within UNICEF.

6. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) was also integrated into the new Competency Framework adopted in 2020, particularly on people management competencies and ethical and self-awareness, and was embedded in training offered to senior managers in the Senior Leaders Orientation, Deputy Representative Leadership Initiative and Management Masterclass. REACH, a professional development initiative for national staff who want to pursue international careers, was successfully launched, and two programmes designed to help staff live and demonstrate UNICEF's Core Values, ASPIRE and the UNICEF Global Mentoring Initiative, were piloted. UNICEF aims at providing its staff, current and future leaders, with the skills, resources, tools and relationships needed to work successfully in an intercultural environment.
7. All these initiatives came from a shared understanding that a strong sense of belonging, where people can bring their whole selves to work, has a correlation with commitment, motivation and pride to work at UNICEF, directly translating to better results for children and families.
8. In May 2020, triggered by multiple incidents of violence against Black men and women in the USA, thousands of people —especially young people— took to the streets around the world to demand an end to racism, intolerance and inequality. Issues of race and ethnicity had not been explicitly addressed within UNICEF previously, when the global movement for racial equity gathered unprecedented momentum and some staff members in UN entities, including UNICEF, started to speak up about their own experiences with racism in the workplace.
9. As a follow up to those events, in June 2020 Executive Director Henrietta Fore commissioned the creation of an internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination to identify and enact measures to address discrimination in UNICEF, with a specific focus on race and ethnicity.

II. Findings of the Task Team

10. Between June 2020 and March 2021, the Task Team worked across all levels of the Organization to better understand UNICEF employees' experiences of racism and discrimination. The Task Team produced an Action Plan benefitting from the ideas of hundreds of employees, provided through Focus Group Discussions, online anonymous forms, emails, and internal social media platforms. The Action Plan was also reviewed by external experts, peers, and by several UN and other intergovernmental organizations.
11. The report found evidence that racism and discrimination – especially against Black UNICEF personnel – exists in all regions. Evidence of other forms of discrimination, based on appearance, age, caste, ethnicity, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, geographic origin and discrimination based on language, was also found. The impact of intersectionality emerged strongly in numerous discussions, with personnel who experience discrimination based on multiple factors such as age and gender (young women) or race and contract type (Black national staff).
12. Although discrimination is a reality for many UNICEF personnel, there are fears of retaliation or retribution that prevent people from speaking up, confronting racist and discriminatory behaviour, or

reporting it. Regular awareness-raising campaigns to encourage reporting of wrongdoing and policy reforms in UNICEF's integrity framework have slightly decreased the fear of retaliation as measured in the Global Staff Survey, but a higher level of trust is needed in the organization's human resources, ethics, and investigation system, particularly when dealing with racist behaviours.

13. Many UNICEF employees are unsure of how to have conversations about racism and discrimination, about what terminology to use, and how to approach these subjects. Even so, the report indicates an appetite among employees to talk about it, share experiences and find solutions to reduce discrimination.
14. Discrimination is often country/region-specific. A few country offices have already conducted some work on diversity and inclusion aimed at increasing the representation of historically marginalized communities (i.e. by gender and caste or ethnicity). However, country offices sometimes risk replicating the power imbalances of the contexts they are in, particularly when managers in the office come from the most privileged (caste, class, ethnicity) sections of society.
15. Among IP staff, the present categorization and setting of targets of industrial country and programme country nationals is not equitable and does not present an accurate or complete picture of diversity. For example, industrial country staff make up a disproportionate percentage of our workforce, compared to the actual representation of industrial countries globally (there are 33 industrial countries out of a total of 195 countries where UNICEF works). Overall, industrial country staff make up 18.4 per cent of UNICEF's global workforce but 44.8 per cent among IPs. Programme country staff are normally hired by the Organization for National Officer and General Service posts, yet many programme regions are not sufficiently represented at senior decision-making levels in the IP cadre.
16. Considering the above, the Task Team recommends that UNICEF strives to achieve the following impact-level result:

UNICEF is an organization that contributes to the global movement for social and racial justice. It embraces and promotes diversity, equity and inclusion among its employees, across all its internal systems and processes, and across all its areas of work for children.

17. The Task Team's Report and Action Plan presents actions in eight main areas.
 - I. **Awareness-raising:** Office-level conversations in country offices, in regional offices, across regions, and in headquarters divisions need to be carried out to enable all employees to better understand each other's experiences, and to increase overall awareness of these issues, especially of behaviours such as unconscious bias and micro-aggressions. Various internal communications products, tools, channels should be established, as part of an internal communications campaign.
 - II. **Capacity building:** Actions in this area relate to building the skills and capacities all UNICEF personnel (including managers, HR practitioners, staff counsellors, etc.) on different aspects of anti-racism and discrimination, for example, on conscious and unconscious bias; bystander/upstander interventions; etc. It is also recommended that the Executive Board participate in an awareness-raising session on these issues. Employee Affinity Groups should be strengthened with additional investments in their capacities, making them even more effective representatives and advocates.

III. **Accountability and protection:** The recommendations here relate to ensuring that the institutional structures are in place for UNICEF to address racism and discrimination issues in a sustained way. A Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) should be hired with a team, and specific policies are suggested for review/revision/updating from a stronger DEI lens. It is recommended that the Office of Internal Audit and Investigation (OIAI) strengthens its data collection on allegations of racism specifically.

IV. **External communications, fundraising and brand:** The priority here is to create an internal communication, C4D, and fundraising global reference group to guide all aspects of these functions from a DEI perspective. This would help ensure that UNICEF uses its communications, fundraising and brand to promote dignity, respect, and diversity, in our images, communications, brand, and fundraising.

V. **Recruitment and career development:** This section includes actions related to recruitment (increasing the representation of various historically under-represented groups in different staff categories including Black staff); and learning, mentoring and other professional development programmes for specific groups of under-represented staff. The issue of how and where UNICEF chooses to establish global hubs is also included in this section.

VI. **Data and monitoring:** Major improvements are suggested for enhancing UNICEF's ability to generate and use data on DEI in its workforce, building on work done since the Report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority (the ITF report) in 2019. It is recommended that UNICEF collects additional data (on a voluntary basis and confidentially) on different aspects of identity – race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation – for all its personnel.

VII. **Programme, supply and procurement:** Actions here are designed to enable UNICEF to use its weight in market-shaping and influencing to bring a more diverse range suppliers into global markets. With respect to programme, the actions focus on how UNICEF, working with relevant partners such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Global Programme Partners as well as local implementing partners from civil society, can use its programming support/interventions to be more actively anti-racist and anti-discriminatory in all contexts.

VIII. **UN system-wide actions:** This section includes several actions that go beyond UNICEF and require UN system-wide action. These include bringing more diversity to how Executive Directors/Heads of Agencies are selected, UN system-wide learning on anti-racism and discrimination and reviewing the UN's staff categories (International Professional/National Officer/General Service) from an equity lens.

III. Implementation of Task Team Recommendations: Next steps

18. The Executive Director welcomed the report of the Task Team in late April 2021. Business owners in the different offices (legal, policy, investigations, human resources, ethics, communications, etc.) have started to evaluate the feasibility of the recommendations. A preliminary assessment follows.

I. **Awareness-raising:** All the recommendations can be implemented. Some of this work has already started, with several HQ divisions, regional and country offices hosting conversations on unconscious

bias and micro-aggressions using external facilitators. However, dialogue about racism and inclusion is highly personal and often charged and intense. In the hands of a non-expert such conversations can lead to more harm being done. We would therefore like to emphasize that when these discussions are taking place that they are hosted by facilitators experienced in addressing racism, equity and inclusion.

Having discussions or dialogues to raise awareness is different from having discussions intended to change behaviours. There are different types of conversations and one size does not fit all. Based on the recent Global Staff Survey results on diversity and inclusion, there seems to be a disconnect between awareness and behaviour. Internal communications and the area of communications for development can contribute to the design of a solid methodology for these conversations to drive staff engagement and produce behavioural change, as well as to properly integrate anti-racism and discrimination elements into global campaigns around our core values.

DHR will work together with others (DEI unit in OED, DOC, OIAI, Ethics, Ombudsman) to offer a curated set of essential tools that Representatives and Directors, Staff Reps, PSVs and HR practitioners can tailor to local contexts and use consistently for awareness-raising and to monitor progress, under the assumption that this should not be one-time exercise but a continuous journey. Measuring changes on attitudes and behaviours over time as a result of these activities, as well as those under 'capacity-building', will be critical to assess impact.

II. **Capacity building:** Most of the recommendations can be supported without further reflection. A new training on racism and discrimination may need to be embedded into a broader DEI training with a strong anti-racist component, to make sure we build on an intersectional approach to anti-discrimination efforts. We would need to develop an interactive and continuous learning journey instead of another mandatory training to increase impact. Inter-agency discussions on an anti-discrimination capacity-building journey for all UN personnel are ongoing. Modules for senior managers can be embedded into the current Senior Leaders Orientation, Deputy Representative Leadership Initiative and Management Masterclass. Connecting to the previous set of recommendations on awareness-raising, senior managers need to create an inclusive work environment to ensure all personnel feel safe to speak up when they see behaviours that are perceived as discriminatory or racist. The recommendation to formalize current employee resource groups and encourage the creation of more is welcomed and will build upon the experience the World Bank has in this area.

III. **Accountability and protection:** The recommendation to establish a Director of DEI with a team is a good initiative to showcase organizational commitment towards this area and make these issues more visible. DEI could be integrated under the current portfolio of Organizational Culture, whose work on the promotion of core values is highly connected to DEI. However, it would be important to clarify that the responsibility for ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion has to be shared by everybody, in every office, at every level.

The other recommendations, addressed to OIAI, Ethics and DHR, require further reflection. There needs to be clarity, for example, on what is meant by "zero-tolerance" in the targets. As understood now in the context of sexual harassment and other types of prohibited conduct, this would not mean that any racist or discriminatory behaviour will automatically result in separation from service, as this

would likely lead to disproportionate sanctions in some cases. Rather, it could mean that such behaviour is not tolerated in the workplace and that violations will be properly addressed, including through investigations/disciplinary measures.

The recommendation to improve accountability and transparency through a global surveillance and tracking system for harassment and abuse of power to prevent perpetrators from moving office to office or across UN organizations will have to be discussed with other UN entities and is not dependent on a UNICEF decision. UNICEF may engage through system-wide initiatives to expand existing tracking databases to include all types of prohibited conduct, including racist behaviour and conduct that is discriminatory. More broadly, all recommendations on policy reviews, amendments and revision process of our integrity framework require further analysis as to the need and efficacy of suggestions, UN-wide efforts and consistency with UN legal framework.

IV. **External communications, fundraising and brand:** Some of the recommendations can be supported and some require further reflection. A working group of the externally facing Division within UNICEF (Division of Communications, Private Sector Fundraising, Country Office and NatCom communications staff), reviewed the existing representation guidelines with an anti-racism and discrimination lens to ensure clarity around, and sharpen the requirement for, diversity in imagery and to further eliminate any prospective discrimination in communications. This group has established new guidelines that are currently under review. UNICEF will also develop capacity-building activities to ensure the revised guidelines are fully socialized across the organization.

The recommendation to set up a dedicated communications, C4D and fundraising global reference group to review material solely from a DEI perspective is not feasible and will not, in our view, add value. We note that communications material is produced quickly against sharp deadlines, and that additional review process will significantly reduce its value and effectiveness. We also note that communications material is generated from many different parts of UNICEF and it is therefore very unlikely that such a group would be able to make a significant difference. It is our hope that the new guidance developed by a diverse group of experts with a strong DEI lens, will help steer material sourced and used across the organization in the intended direction.

V. **Recruitment and career development:** Some of the recommendations can be supported, some need further reflection. Work already underway within DHR includes partnering with universities to bring a more diverse pool of entry-level candidates; discussing with JPO donors to conduct proactive outreach towards people who are Black, of colour, with disabilities, from the LGBTIQ+ community, or from low-income backgrounds; launching a talent programme for employees with disabilities and adding stronger diversity elements to the new Staff Selection Policy. Recommendations to promote the career progression of NOs, where we already have the REACH programme, are also welcome.

The recommendation around assessing prejudice and stereotyping in senior staff recruitment exercises could be taken up by the new assessment centre for senior leadership positions that is being designed to build capacity by identifying future UNICEF leaders who are able to support and drive DEI at UNICEF. The assessment centre process will require candidates to address and successfully navigate issues related to discrimination.

To the extent that the recommendations envision setting hiring quotas based on particular group criteria, this would run against basic principles of the international civil service, which is primarily based on “securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity” with due regard paid to “recruiting staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible” (Art. 101 UN Charter and UN Staff Regulation 4.2). UNICEF may set certain diversity goals but this may not result in giving automatic preference to staff members of any given group when making hiring decisions. Care would be required in drafting the relevant procedures to ensure that we remain in compliance with these documents.

VI. **Data and monitoring:** Some of the recommendations can be supported, some need further reflection. Despite current system challenges and limitations, DHR has heavily invested in data-driven approaches to managing people over the years and current capabilities allow for complex analysis using multiple diversity variables. Voluntary data collection on race/ethnicity, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation can be integrated into our current systems, but its use for purposes of equitable representation will depend on response rates from personnel as well as compliance with UNICEF and UN legal framework. Shifting the diversity indicator from the current binary (industrial/programme countries) to more equitable regional representation is feasible in the short term, and the recommendation around data collection of exit interviews is already being implemented.

All data collection efforts as well as access to that information must comply with UNICEF’s Protection of Personal Data Policy and subordinate guidance. To the extent that the recommendations require collection of information on staff’s race/ethnicity/sexual orientation/disability and other factors, they may raise privacy issues and run counter to UNICEF’s data protection standards. In some jurisdictions, requiring, collecting and storing such information for employment-related purposes is not legal. It also runs against recent trends to ensure that particular information (for instance revealing sexual orientation) is not visible to the hiring manager.

VII. **Programme, supply and procurement:** Some of the recommendations can be supported, some need further reflection. Supply Division’s work to enable access to essential services and supplies for children in the most marginalized communities by incentivizing or technically supporting suppliers to innovate and improve solutions is underway. UNICEF has also encouraged new suppliers to enter the market by providing them with technical guidance on how to meet the quality standards and by improving visibility on procurement needs. This enabled UNICEF to move from one supplier based in France in 2001 to today’s network of 20 suppliers, of which 17 are based in programme countries.

The recommendation to review the diversity in the supply community from a race/ethnicity and gender perspective and identify measures to address gaps can be implemented following recommendations under ‘recruitment and career development’, without focusing only on the supply community.

The recommendations to make our programmes more explicitly anti-racist are welcome and will be explored by relevant business owners.

VIII. **UN system-wide actions:** UNICEF is currently active in different inter-agency groups which allow for a continuous exchange of best practices, allowing for the co-creation of policies, capacity-building, and communications products in the DEI area. Such groups include:

HLCM, with ongoing work on work-life harmony and diversity and inclusion; UN LGBTIQ+ Task Team, soon to bring recommendations to improve the inclusion of such personnel; the inter-agency group on racial discrimination and its sub-group on anti-racist learning; the disability inclusion inter-agency group and Reasonable Accommodation Inter-Agency Task Force; the gender parity group of UN focal points; the DEI group with International Financial Institutions; and the inter-agency group on domestic abuse.

The recommendation to review the UN staff classification system from an equity perspective will need inter-agency agreement and essential input from Member States to move forward. The upcoming UN Secretary-General's Task Force on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All is likely to support some of these recommendations as well.

IV. Conclusions

19. Racism and discrimination are unacceptable in all their forms. Given that equity and human rights are at the core of UNICEF's mandate, we must continue to address these issues both in the communities in which we work and in our workplace.
20. The efforts to improve our organizational culture intensified since 2018 with the publication of several reports: The Independent Panel Review report on UNICEF's Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; the Morgan Lewis review on Sexual Harassment; the EDGE/Gender Equality Report; and the Independent Task Force report on Workplace Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority. Our response to those reports has been swift and comprehensive, and has led us to higher levels of staff engagement and satisfaction.
21. Recent developments around the world to demand an end to racism, intolerance and inequality have built momentum and intensified the need for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in organizations.
22. While some of the recommendations laid out in the Task Team Action Plan will require further analysis and consultations, both within UNICEF and at the inter-agency level, they show a clear path to tackle deep-seated racial discrimination and prejudice in our institution and in the programmes we deliver:
23. **Firstly**, we need to level the playing field for all employees by removing barriers that prevent equitable access to programmes, services, benefits, resources and opportunities, including opportunities to join and pursue a career at UNICEF; **Secondly**, we need to make sure our programmes, supply chain and global communications promote anti-racism and anti-discrimination, ensuring a stronger human rights-based approach to programming with more attention to historically marginalized groups in the communities where UNICEF works; **Thirdly**, we need to create an environment where everyone feels safe, valued and respected, and where there is zero tolerance against ageist, sexist, ableist, racist, homophobic, transphobic and other micro- or macro-aggressions based on personal characteristics or cultural backgrounds.

24. **Addressing racism is not a simple, one-time action.** Racism is a complex cultural phenomenon; combatting it demands action every day, at every level. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened pre-existing divides, vulnerabilities and inequalities, as well as opened up new fractures, including fault-lines in human rights. But we are convinced that, working together, we can identify, confront and eliminate racism and discrimination to make UNICEF a truly inclusive, diverse and equitable workplace for all.
25. UNICEF looks forward to continuing its close engagement with the Executive Board on all aspects of the implementation of this agenda.
